Weight Loss by Lightweight Rowers and Coxswains

The Sports Medicine Commission of FISA has over several years advised lightweight rowers, coxswains, their coaches and their doctors of the potential dangers of excessive and rapid weight reduction in the form of dehydration and severe dietary restriction.

Excessive water loss by sweating can seriously compromise the ability of the body to regulate temperature, can negatively impact athletic performance, and more importantly, can threaten the health of the athlete. Catastrophic injury can result from excessive dehydration and there have been deaths in top level athletes.

Water loss of more than 2% of bodyweight can reduce competitive and training performances. Re-hydration during the two hour period following weigh-in may not adequately restore an athlete to a healthy hydrated state for racing.

It is the responsibility of all members of the rowing community (athletes, coaches, medical staff, and officials) to work together to ensure that lightweight rowing is healthy and safe. This means that no athlete should voluntarily or upon instruction, resort to extreme measures for excessive and rapid dehydration by use of occlusive clothing, saunas or diuretics. The practice of dehydrating by the use of diuretics and rehydrating by intravenous infusion are both banned by FISA and WADA (http://www.wada-ama.org/en/World-Anti-Doping-Program/Sports-and-Anti-Doping-Organizations/The-Code/)

Recommendations of the Medical Commission

We recommend that lightweight rowers and coxswains intending to compete at FISA regattas should weigh no more than 3 kg above the required racing weight on January 1. By March, they should weigh no more than 2 kg above their racing weight. It is recommended that in the 24 hours prior to racing, weight reduction should not exceed 1 kg.

Measuring both percentage body fat and body weight is an excellent method of monitoring and controlling weight loss among lightweights and coxswains. FISA encourages National Federations to include body fat testing in the assessment of all athletes especially lightweights and coxswains.

Monitoring hydration state is important. It can be simply done by the use of urine colour charts or testing for urine specific gravity. For further information, go to ***Safety Guidelines.***

FISA Medical Commission 9th October 2010